WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1   1.   A system of controlling the distribution of pills between a

2   manufacturer and a consumer, said system comprising:

3   a machine-readable code on a surface of each of said pills, said code

4   conveying information relating to one of lot number, date of manufacture, date of

5   expiration, manufacturer, location of manufacturer, and National Drug Code number;

6   and

7   a scanner adapted to read said machine-readable code of said at least one

8   of said pills ~~so that information conveyed by said code may be interpreted~~; and

9   ~~means for scanning~~ _a scanner arranged to scan_ said at least one of said pills during the distribution

10   between said manufacturer and said consumer ~~so that said scanned pill may be identified~~

11   ~~according to said interpreted information, and its distribution thereby controlled~~.

1   2.   A pill containing a drug and having a surface, said pill comprising:

        a machine-readable code located on said surface, said code relating to one

3   of drug information, manufacturing information, and contraindications of the drug.

1   3.   ~~The~~ _A_ pill according to claim 2, wherein said pill includes a

2   transparent layer defining an outer surface and an inner surface, said code being located

3   on said inner surface so that said code may be machine-read through said transparent

4   layer.

1   4.   The pill according to claim 2, wherein said pill has an outer surface

2   that is generally rough and porous and defines a total surface area, said pill including a

3   code-receiving region, said code-receiving region including a layer of material made from

4   one of gelatin, keratin, collagen wax, sugar, protein, plastic, and sugar-based composition,

5   said code-receiving region having a surface area that is less than said total surface area of

6   said pill.

1   6.   The pill according to claim 2, wherein said machine-readable code is

2   a 2-dimensional, high-density bar code matrix.

1   7.   The pill according to claim 6, wherein said 2-dimensional, high-

2   density bar code matrix is PDF-417 type bar code.

8.   A pill according to claim 1 having a machine-readable code thereon, the code having a

2   coded pattern that is too difficult for an unaided human eye after glancing the coded

3   pattern to discern differences within the coded pattern that may distinguish the coded

4   pattern from others of the same type.

1   9. A pill as in claim 8, wherein the coded pattern lacks alphanumeric

2   characters.

34

1   10. A pill as in claim 8, further comprising a label on which is printed the

2   machine readable code, said label being on a body of the pill.

1   11. A pill as in claim 8, wherein the pill is any one of a tablet and capsule.

1   12. A pill as in claim 8, wherein the code is of a dimension that is at most

2   one-tenth a size of a standard UPC bar code.

1   13. A process for applying a bar code to a surface of a pill, comprising

2   the steps of:

3   a)   providing a thin sheet of biocompatible material;

4   b)   applying said code onto one surface of said thin sheet; and

5   c)   adhering said thin sheet to said surface of said pill.

1   14. The process for applying a bar code to a surface of a pill, according

2   to claim 13, wherein the step of applying includes printing said code onto said one

3   surface.

1   15. The process for applying a bar code to a surface of a pill, according

2   to claim 13, wherein the step of applying includes embossing said code into said one

3   surface.

1   16.   The process for applying a bar code to a surface of a pill according

2   to claim 13, wherein the step of providing a thin sheet of biocompatible material includes

3   providing a thin layer of gelatin mounted on a release sheet and said further including a

4   step of removing said release sheet from said gelatin so that said gelatin remains adhered

5   to said one surface of said pill.

1   17.   The process for applying a bar code to a surface of a pill according

2   to claim 16, wherein said adhering step includes applying water to one of said one

3   surface and said gelatin layer.

1   18. A method of avoiding confusion between pills, comprising the steps of:

2   reading a machine readable code on a pill with a reader wherein the

3   machine readable code includes a coded pattern that is too difficult for an unaided

4   human eye after glancing the coded pattern to discern differences within the coded

5   pattern that may distinguish the coded pattern from others of the same type; and

6   identifying any one of a source, distributor, and contents of the pill based

7   on the step of reading.

1   19. A method as in claim 18, wherein the code is read from a label on the

2   pill.

1   20. A method as in claim 18, wherein the code is read from an imprint

2 directly on the pill.

1   21. A method as in claim 18, wherein the step of identifying includes

2 determining the distributor of the pill for purposes of tracking gray goods.

1   22. A method as in claim 18, wherein the step of identifying includes

2 identifying the contents while reading the code on pills having any one of a same shape

3 and a same color.

1   23. A method as in claim 18, wherein the step of identifying includes

2 identifying the source of a plurality of pills within a common container for purposes of

3 determining whether all came from a common source.

1   24. A method as in claim 18, wherein the step of identifying includes

2 identifying the source for purposes of distinguishing between a brand name supplier and

3 a generic supplier of the pills.

1   25. A method as in claim 18, wherein the step of identifying includes

2 identifying the contents for purposes of conducting clinical trials.

1   26. A method as in claim 18, wherein the step of identifying includes

2   identifying the contents of successive pills and make an indication if taking the successive

3   pills at the same time would cause the medication each contains to chemically react with

4   any one of each other and the body environment in a medically undesirable manner.

1   27. A method as in claim 18, wherein the step of identifying includes

2   identifying the contents for purposes of sorting medication of different contents.

1   28. A method as in claim 18, wherein the step of identifying includes .

2   identifying the contents for the purpose of making a medical evaluation of a person

3   taking the pill.

1   29. A method as in claim 18, wherein the step of reading is carried out

2   with a scanner that emits a laser beam to strike on an area of the machined readable

3   code.

1   30. A method as in claim 18, further comprising the step of recording a

2   timing of the step of reading and storing in a data base information containing the

3   timing and that which was read during the step of reading.

1   31. A method as in claim 30, further concerning the step of reading a

2 further coded pattern indicative of nutrition and diet and storing the further coded

3 pattern in the data base.

1   32. A method of efficacy record keeping, comprising the steps of:

2   (a)) scanning a coded pattern from which medication contents may be

3 correlated;

4   (b) clocking a time of day that the scanning is carried out;

5   (c) further scanning of other coded patterns from which nutritional items

6 may be correlated;

7   (d) clocking the step of further scanning;

8   (e) signaling commencement and ending of efficacy of the medication;

9   (f) clocking the step of signaling; and

10   (g) storing results of steps (a) to (f).

1   33. A method as in claim 32, further comprising the step of deriving the

2 medication contents and the food items from the stored results of step (g) based on

3 correlating with information in a data base; and retrieving the results from step (g)

4 timing information corresponding to that which was clocked.

1   34. A method as in claim 32, further comprising the steps of evaluating

2   steps (a) to (g) for a situation that is less than optimal for a duration of efficacy of the

3   medication and indicating a warning in response to finding the situation as a result of the

4   step of evaluating.

1   35. A method of conducting a clinical trial of pills, comprising the steps of:

2   providing a plurality of pills each having an alpha-numeric code readable

3   with an unaided eye and a machine readable code that too difficult for an unaided

4   human eye after glancing of the coded pattern to discern differences within the coded

5   pattern that may distinguish the coded pattern from others of the same type, said

6   patterns being different on a group of the pills and the alpha-numeric code being

7   identical on said group of the pills; and

8   scanning the machine readable code to determine whether the pills being

9   scanned at any given time is a placebo.

1   36. A method of conducting a clinical trial of pills, comprising the steps of:

2   providing a plurality of pills each within a package, at least one of the

3   package and the pill having an alpha-numeric code readable with an unaided eye and a

4   machine readable code whose patterns fail to be discernable from a glance with the

5   unaided eye to distinguish over those of a same type, said patterns that are associated

6   with a group of said pills being different from each other and the alpha-numeric codes

7   that are associated with said group of the pills being identical with each other; and

40

8   scanning the machine readable code to determine whether any of the pills

9   within the packages being scanned at any given time is a placebo.

1   37. A method of manufacturing a pill having medication contents,

2   comprising the steps of:

3   forming the pill by layers one atop the other, the layers including an inner

4   layer, an outer layer and an intermediate layer between the inner and outer layers, the

5   step of forming including forming the intermediate layer by printing with a substance

6   that is edible and digestible.

1   38. A method as in claim 37, wherein the step of printing with the

2   substance forms part of the medication contents.

1   39. A method as in claim 37, wherein the printing arranges the substance

2   in a manner that is machine readable code.

41